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30 March 1976

DRAFT MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Lebanon--Implication of Ascendency of the
Lebanese Left

Radical Muslim and leftist groups are emerging from the prolonged fighting in Lebanon with considerable new popular support, military strength, and political resolve. Even before the collapse of the Syrian-sponsored cease-fire in early March, the leftists had proved they were a formidable political as well as military force that could intimidate old-line Muslim politicians and directly challenge the Christian military establishment.

Events of the last several weeks have demonstrated that the Lebanese far-left can virtually silence traditional Muslim leaders and can inflict chastening defeats on the major Christian militias. The leftists military successes have resulted in part from the increasingly active support they have received from independent fedayeen groups, especially Yasir Arafat's Fatah. Thus, both the military and political prospects of the left will hinge to a large extent on support from Arafat. It is conceivable that the leftists will in the critical weeks and months ahead gain the upper hand in Lebanon.

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No matter how the relationship between Palestinian and leftist leaders fares, however, the leftists will be a very powerful and influential factor on the Lebanese scene in the future.

The Muslim-Leftist Coalition

The task of controlling or even negotiating with the extreme left is complicated by the fact that it is a collection of fringe groups allied mainly by a sense that together they can gain the advantage in Lebanon. There is no dominant leader or faction that can be either readily isolated or brought into what remains of the old political system.

Kamal Jumblatt, however, appears to have increasingly gained authority to represent the leftist-Muslim coalition. His long record of speaking out against the Christian and Sunni Muslim establishments and his agitation for minority rights and economic and social change have gained him stature among younger Muslim radicals. Moreover, his private militia, which numbers several thousand, is the largest in the leftist front.

Although Jumblatt by no means controls his radical allies, his ability to exploit the inherent weaknesses in Lebanon's traditional political fabric--its inequities and rigidity to change--has been the key to his success, and--as his allies seem to recognize--to their ascendancy as well.

Despite his conservative Druze roots and the tempering effect they have had on his brand of socialism, Jumblatt has

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historically had a keen sense of the drift toward the left throughout the Arab world. He has long been one of the most outspoken advocates of the Palestinian cause in Lebanon, and although he never embraced Nasirism, many of his political and social views paralleled it. Although Jumblatt was generally regarded as a gadfly in traditional Lebanese political circles and before the outbreak of fighting last year had little appeal beyond his own Druze constituency, he is now listened to as much for what he rejected as for what he espoused. Many of his younger colleagues no doubt are benefiting from the viewpoint he represents.

Most other leftist leaders are locally-based and urban. They have no well-defined ideology beyond a strong commitment to Palestinian and Arab causes, a desire to overturn Christian minority rule, and a general penchant for radicalism. Before Lebanon dissolved into full-scale civil strife, these leaders tended to negotiate or fight among themselves for control over the "streets" in their home districts. Their support has come from disadvantaged Muslim and minority groups who shared a defiance of traditional leaders. These leftist agitators were not responsible for starting nationwide fighting last year, but they were in several instances responsible for the collapse of cease-fire agreements.

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The most successful leaders to emerge are Ibrahim Qulaylat in Beirut, Faruq Muqaddam in Tripoli, and Mustafa Saad in Sidon. Muqaddam and Saad are scions of old-line political families in Lebanon, and can be expected to espouse a relatively tempered leftist line. They are far outnumbered, however, by men like Ibrahim Qulaylat, who is little more than a reconstituted street hoodlum. Although these newly-emerged leftist leaders have loosely coordinated their military actions and together may command fighters numbering in the thousands, they would probably have differing perceptions on courses of action in negotiations for a political settlement.

The rebel Lebanese Arab Army headed by Ahmad Khatib has been a key component in the leftist military coalition. We estimate that Khatib's followers have swelled from several hundred in late January to roughly 2-3,000. Although many of these may be only hangers-on, most are trained soldiers who brought with them arms, ammunition, and some heavy weaponry. Khatib has probably not been able to effectively organize his band; moreover, there does not appear to be any abiding allegiance to Khatib's leadership within the renegade army, except among a core group of several hundred.

We have only scant information on Khatib's political leanings, but assume that the success and fame he has achieved by cooperating with the left would insure his adherence to its

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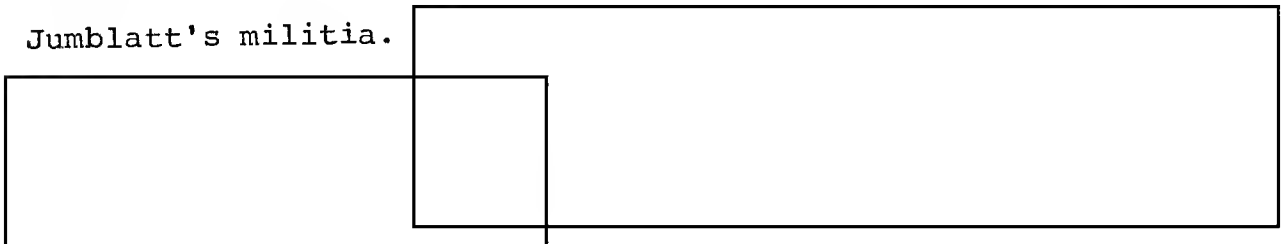
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political demands. He may not, however, be able to deliver all of his following, if a cease-fire is established.

The rapid ascendancy of the Lebanese left has triggered intense competition among outsiders for influence over individual leftist groups. Syria, its Palestinian client Saiqa, and Fatah are, of course, the primary patrons of the radical Muslims in Lebanon; together, they supply the major leftist militias with arms and ammunition and provide training and some advisers. Libya and Iraq also supply some small arms and money, but have been prevented by the Syrians--who control the major supply routes into Lebanon--from gaining exclusive sponsorship over any one group or establishing any significant influence over the leftist movement as a whole.

Most of Libya's material aid has been channeled through fedayeen "rejectionists" to Nasirite groups headed by Ibrahim Qulaylat and Isam al-Arab, and to a lesser extent to Kamal Jumblatt's militia.

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Iraq has concentrated primarily on bolstering its client faction of the Lebanese Baath Party, but has also given some support to Jumblatt, Mustafa Saad, the Lebanese Communist Party, and--through fedayeen rejectionists--a number of other splinter groups.

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25X1 Rivalry between Syria and Fatah for controlling influence over the left, combined with challenges from Iraq and Libya, have had the net effect of giving the major leftist leaders a measure of independence from any one outside sponsor.

Despite the meddling of others, we believe determined Syrian action could cause the leftists to run dangerously short of military supplies--at least over the short term.

The Egyptian Angle

Egypt's preoccupation throughout the Lebanon crisis has been with the prospect that Syria will strengthen its leadership position in the Arab world by a successful effort to settle the conflict. Above all, Cairo wants to avoid a Syrian-imposed settlement that would so entrench Syria's influences in Lebanon as to give it virtual control over the country and, with it, control over the Palestinian movement.

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The Egyptians

dropped their previously neutral stance among the Lebanese parties, openly praising Jumblatt for his anti-Syrian posture and for the first time blaming the current impasse on Franjiah. The Egyptians are convinced that Syria is aiding the Christians and is prolonging the fighting by insisting on a constitutional transfer of power from Franjiah. They believe that the facade of legitimacy is not worth the bloodshed that is occurring while Franjiah dallies, and President Sadat last week called on Franjiah to resign.

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Implications

The events of the past two weeks appear to have ensured the political ascendancy of the left in Lebanon, although their current military momentum may be short-lived. The leftists will not be able to overwhelm the Christian core area unless they continue to receive arms through Syria and continued military support from Fatah.

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[REDACTED] the strength of the Muslim-leftist coalition could be rapidly diminished should the Syrian border be closed to all arms shipments. Fatah's support may also be wavering, in part because Arafat appears to believe that he should not risk further alienating Asad and in part, because he may anticipate large-scale Syrian intervention.

If the Syrians do intervene, Arafat would cease direct military support to Jumblatt and Khatib. If Syria does not intervene, Arafat will continue to give substantial military support to the left. Hence, some form of military stalemate is likely to ensue even without more Syrian intervention, although the area under leftist control is likely to be considerably expanded.

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If a ceasefire is arranged and negotiations resume, the present loose alliance under Jumblatt may fragment to some degree and the left will not necessarily be as formidable politically as they have been militarily. There are obvious differences among the leftists in terms of personality, ideology, regional interests, and constituencies which will make it difficult for Jumblatt to present a united left position on every issue. Jumblatt, for example, will have some difficulty in balancing the concerns of his rural conservatize Druze followers with the demands of the Muslim "street" constituency of Qulaylat.

Nevertheless, the leftists now have sufficient common ground to enable them to remain the most powerful voice on the Muslim side and a force that cannot be isolated and weakened by the traditional Muslim leaders, the Christians, or Syria. The leftists appear united in seeking substantial reduction in Christian political influence, economic adjustment in favor of the Muslims, deconfessionalization in government and the army, close ties with the Palestinians, and indeed, a reduction in Syrian influence in Lebanon. The military successes they have achieved will strengthen their political position and augment the popular support of the various leftist leaders. Most importantly the leftists

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appear to have significantly eroded the political constituencies of the moderate Muslim leaders like Rashid Karami and Saib Salam. The traditional leaders proved incapable of either arresting or capitalizing on the leftists' momentum in recent weeks, and they can be expected to be intimidated in any future negotiations by the leftists political and military potential.

The leftists are not in a position to dictate a future settlement, but they will not be persuaded to accept a refurbished version of the Syrian-backed reform package achieved in February. The problems in accommodation are easier to see than solutions, but presumably there will have to be more concessions on issues such as deconfessionalization, social and economic reform, and the Palestinian presence. Whatever the case, it seems clear that the leftists' strength will ensure the continuation of de facto partition and will complicate the problem of reconstituting an effective national security authority in Lebanon.

The combination of Palestinians and Muslim leftists already control approximately two thirds of Lebanon and have circumscribed Christian control in Beirut itself. This means that any reconstituted government in Beirut will continue to be weak and, in effect, will be operating

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within a confederal framework. Moreover, because of the potential leftist Muslim-Palestinian political ascendancy in south Lebanon, the area will be regarded as posing an even greater security threat by the Israelis.

The gain in leftist strength also makes it highly unlikely that the Muslims would again allow Christian domination of a reconstituted Lebanese army. The army is likely to emerge with a more Muslim and leftist character and it will be a force less willing or able to reign in the Palestinians.

The pan-Arab implications of the leftist gains in Lebanon are difficult to assess but several points stand out. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the leftists' military momentum in recent weeks is that it has severely circumscribed Syria's ability and even willingness to influence the situation. Syria's agents among the Palestinians, the PLA and Saiga, have proved to be unreliable instruments when pitted directly against fellow Muslims. Popular support within Syria for the renegade Lieutenant Khatib and broad identification with the Palestinian cause have inhibited Asad from pursuing an even-handed policy. Asad perhaps failed earlier to intervene in Lebanon on a large scale militarily because of the Israeli constraint.

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His delay, however, has also been due to his inability to separate Syrian goals from the positions taken by the Palestinians and the Muslim left. He cannot appear to be supporting the Christians against the left, a point brought home by the disgruntlement which his policy of accommodating the Christians has caused among the Syrian military and the civilian Baath party.

The limits of Syrian influence in Lebanon have also been exposed by the fact that the Muslim leftists and Fatah have cooperated to resist Syrian dominance. The more direct a role Syria has attempted to play, the more it has served to catalyze the left against Damascus' policy. The leftists and Arafat, in particular, can be expected to continue to attempt to preserve their freedom of maneuver and to exploit any opportunity for playing off other Arab states, both radicals and conservatives, against Asad.

The necessity for the other Arabs to maintain at least their identification with the cause of Palestinian independence will prevent them from endorsing Syria's efforts to curb the Lebanese left and Arafat. The Saudis, for example, apparently share Asad's desire for an even-handed solution but they, no more than he, can afford to be

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seen to be attempting to actively siding with the Christians against the left and the Palestinians. Some Arab states appear to be doing what they can to exploit the left in Lebanon to undercut Syria's pretensions to Arab leadership. Iraq will continue to fund the left, perhaps primarily to create difficulties for Asad. Libya, although not opposed to Asad, will promote the leftist cause in hopes of turning Lebanon eventually into a radical confrontation state. Egypt will attempt to retrieve its own primacy in pan-Arab leadership by seeking to bolster Arafat's independence and to reinstate itself as the leading patron of the Palestinians.

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Thus, a salient implication of the leftist momentum in Lebanon is that Syria's position as the arbiter of Lebanon's domestic politics has been seriously weakened and its pretensions toward broader Arab leadership are being eroded. Asad may yet manage by political suasion, cessation of arms supplies, or further intervention to compose a solution that would be supported by the left and the Palestinians. But his need to refurbish his own leftist-Palestinian credentials and to protect both his domestic and pan-Arab flanks means that Asad is likely to become as much the prisoner as the mentor of the forces on the left in Lebanon.

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